

HOW TRUTH HAS STUMBLED IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Andrea Williams



'A Church that believes eternity hangs in the balance would boldly proclaim the gospel as the only true remedy for death.'



LAWYER AND CAMPAIGNER ANDREA WILLIAMS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF CHRISTIAN CONCERN AND THE CHRISTIAN LEGAL CENTRE, CALLS FOR A RETURN TO THE TRUTH.

'What is truth?' Pilate famously asked. Even though Pilate found no guilt in Jesus, he had him flogged and then crucified to satisfy the crowd. Or rather, to satisfy the chief priests and elders who had incited the crowd to call for Jesus' death.

Jesus called himself a witness to the truth. 'Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.' Yet in today's society - just as in Jerusalem 2000 years ago - we struggle to listen to God's voice, to stand up for the truth.

I often quote Isaiah 59:14 which seems to describe our society just as well as the nation of Judah:

'Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter.'

So much of what plagues our nation depends on falsehoods. And I'm not talking about the coronavirus. Illness, disasters, crime and poverty will always be challenges. But it's our society itself that is sick. And much of what is wrong with our culture is the lies we've come to believe.

One lie is that your value is found in what you can do. We give honours to the highest achievers in business, sports, entertainment, politics and the arts; not a bad thing in itself, but nothing we can do in our lives matches the value we already have, simply because we were made in the image of God.

But the danger of this lie is really how it makes us act towards those who can do little or nothing - most of all, unwanted babies in their mothers' wombs. 200,000 of them, every year, are deemed disposable because, at that stage of life, they are wholly dependent and have nothing to give. Babies with Down's Syndrome are aborted up until birth - assumed to be a burden, assumed to have no value because people can't see past their genetic condition. It also, tragically, is shown in other countries around the world where people who feel like a burden on others are helped to kill themselves through assisted suicide and euthanasia.

An equal and almost opposite lie is that your value is found in being 'you': in expressing yourself. We assume that expressing our inner being - what we feel we are - is automatically a good thing. But our innermost being isn't necessarily good. Jesus said, 'Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.' Just because we have certain feelings, emotions or desires doesn't make them morally good. And it certainly doesn't make them wise to follow.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in issues of sex and gender. Feeling sexually attracted to a person does not make it OK to pursue them. That leads to adultery, divorce, homosexuality and broken homes. On gender, this is even more obvious - it's not just transgenderism that is being mainstreamed but tens, even hundreds of alternative genders.

'Safeguarding in Schools', for example, informs schoolteachers that: 'Pangender is someone who experiences many genders that can extend infinitely'. Infinitely? New gender definitions are being invented by the day, for example: 'Smokegender', 'Agender' and 'Puzzlegender' each with matching flags. People are trying to reach deep into their souls in an attempt to find and express what's there. But much more glorious, again, is the reality that we are made in God's image, male or female, with real value and real purpose.

We are made, as John Wesley once wrote, to 'know, and love, and enjoy, and serve [our] great Creator to all eternity'. But another lie our society believes is that God does not exist, or at any rate has no interest in our lives. Christianity becomes merely a club for people interested in being kind to others and maybe reading their Bibles - rather than a holy people called to worship God inside and outside church. Until recently, many churches were filled with people who would praise God loudly on Sundays but do little to apply their faith to their home, their workplace or anything else outside the sanctuary walls. Now with COVID restrictions, we've lost even that.

A Church that really believes that eternity hangs in the balance would not only be seeking to stop the coronavirus, but would boldly proclaim the gospel as the only true remedy for death.

But we also go along with the world's lie that Christianity is oppressive: that to disagree with people from another religion or to criticise someone's views, demonstrates a lack of love. We believe that it's the government's job to fix everything rather than praying to God with faith and seeking to be the answer ourselves.

We call good 'evil' and evil 'good'. Truth has stumbled in the public square. Enlightenment philosophers sought to think their way to the truth. Postmodern thinkers came along and questioned whether there was 'a truth' to be found. In different ways, culture is enslaved to one or other of these ideas. But Christians should know better. We follow Christ the Truth! Truth is real and we don't find it primarily by stretching our brains or reasoning from first principles. We find the truth when we listen to God.

WHERE DOES GOD SPEAK?

First, God speaks through creation. The heavens declare the glory of God because God made them that way. God spoke the world into being and everything in it. If we understand it properly, it reveals his character. 'His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.' (Romans 1:20).

We don't always get this right. We are finite. We - including our minds - are marred by the effects of sin. Nevertheless, we can see

the sun rise and know that God is faithful. We can see a rainbow and remember God's promises. We can see God's good design for sex between one man and one woman, for companionship and offspring.

If we are walking in step with the Spirit, we must also believe that God guides our thoughts and actions - that he prompts us to holiness and to worship Jesus. Christians differ on exactly how to understand this - on how to understand prophecy and words of knowledge - but we all must agree that the Holy Spirit really does, in some way, speak to us and guide us.

But, you may say, don't atheist scientists tell us they've looked at the world and can't find God? Aren't transgender people just listening to the voice inside their head? If listening to God simply means paying attention to the world and our feelings, we haven't got anywhere in addressing the lies of society!

That's why the Bible is so precious. The scriptures, breathed out by God, are trustworthy and true. Everything else we think, feel or believe must be tested against what God has clearly said in his written word, or we are lost at sea; adrift without an anchor in the turbulent storms of 21st Century culture.

God's words have profound depth. Rightly understanding just one verse would be enough to undo so many of the falsehoods that society believes:

'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.'
(Genesis 1:27)

There is a God. He made humans to bear his image, endowing us all with purpose, dominion and value. He made men and women the building blocks of society, both equally reflecting God's goodness and ruling under him. Truly understand and believe that verse and you will be immune to so many of the world's lies. And there are 30,000 other verses for us to meditate on, to hear from God and gain his wisdom.

If we rightly are to understand the times we live in, we must be steeped in the Bible. We should know what faith-filled obedience looks like through the law and, as we read stories of the Cloud of Witnesses, we should be filled with its wisdom and overflowing with its songs.

Then, we might be better placed to assess and confront the confusing post-truth culture we live in. Division, confusion, lawlessness, plagues, sexual immorality - these are all biblical signs of a society that has abandoned the true God and embraced the devil's lies. In turn, God judges the nation by giving it more of what it wants, until people realise that God's ways are best and turn back to him.

As Isaiah said, righteousness stands far away. On the topic of abortion alone, 200,000 lives are unjustly taken every year in England and Wales. Our consciences are numb to this horror. Nothing short of wholesale repentance will turn our nation round.

The overwhelmingly good news is that when we do repent - we have a spotless Saviour who is ready to forgive. Jesus is better than our failures and his blood, spilt at the cross, is sufficient to cover every sin. On his account, God forgives us, and the Spirit works in us, pointing us back to the Truth.

'Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice' said Jesus. Why wouldn't we?

Andrea Williams qualified as a barrister in 1988. With her background in law, she founded Christian Concern and the Christian Legal Centre, which have run some of the most high-profile Christian freedom cases and campaigns in Europe. She is a leading analyst, campaigner and spokeswoman on issues of national importance in the moral life of the nation and a defender of Christian liberties in the parliamentary process, the justice system and the media. She is passionate about seeing our culture transformed by the gospel in every area of society. She is married to Gareth and they have four children.

